



Coast Guard Flag Voice 18

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING THE VERY BEST PEOPLE

Recently CAPT Frank Buckley, COMDT (G-WTR-1), the team leader for the CG Reserve Officer Management Study Team, attended the Center for Naval Analysis Senior Seminar on "JO Retention." . He reported this was a great opportunity to hear RADM Natter, USNR (Retired), describe his study on why the Navy is suffering from a JO retention problem. RADM Natter and two of his team members wrote an article on the study for the October 1998 U.S. Naval Institute PROCEEDINGS. Joining CAPT Buckley from the "W" staff were LCDR Bill Kelly, G-WTT-1 and the Junior Officer Needs Assessment (JONA) Study; LT Mike Saramosing, G-WPM-1; and LTJG Rudyard Quiachon, G-WTL-2, also from the JONA Study.

RADM Natter emphasized to the audience, as he had to the JOs he surveyed, this study was not an attempt to convince officers to stay on active duty. In addition, he stressed to the JOs he would not report to the COs on the state of their wardroom. Having set those ground rules, he clearly felt he had open, frank dialogues.

RADM Natter showed a slide stating 88% of those surveyed (94% on submarines) did not aspire to command...a shocking statistic to an audience dominated by flag and general officers. With the obvious follow-up query, "Why?", RADM Natter recited a litany of complaints the majority of those he surveyed voiced reflecting their overall unhappiness.

1. Loss of job satisfaction highlighted by long in-port work days not ameliorated by a sense of accomplishment or recognition (only 15% of JOs felt their COs were enjoying their jobs!!).
2. Self-inflicted pain due to an overemphasis on inspections, the associated preparations, and a resulting decline in war-fighting skills. The Surface Warfare Officer (SWO) community, in particular, lived in fear due to the perception "SWOs eat their young."
3. Micromanagement/Zero-Defect mentality leads to frustration, feelings of powerlessness, lack of opportunity to take chances, etc. Interestingly, they felt these were not limited to JOs, as they had seen evidence of their "boss's bosses" showing the same attitude toward their COs.
4. Erosion of benefits, particularly quality of life and medical care, especially for dependents. At the seminar, RADM Natter mentioned pay was not a major irritant, but retirement-related issues were, e.g., shrinking retirement pay percentage, probability of earning a retirement.
5. Lack of confidence in leaders to represent the facts honestly to their bosses, Congress, etc. In the midst of their frustration due to lack of people, materiel, etc., the JOs do not want to hear everything is rosy.

The Coast Guard workforce has changed dramatically over the years, and concerns about job

satisfaction, family, etc., surface far more readily than they did in generations past. Many points RADM Natter's study raises are consistent with those mentioned in the JONA surveys and requests for resignations of commissions. In the CG Reserve Officer study, we're finding people willing to redefine the word "success" differently from the promotion-laden connotation of the past.

Clearly, these issues provide us a considerable challenge as we look to attract and retain the very best workforce for the future. These are not just Human Resource System ("G-W") issues, but Coast Guard leadership issues at every level and every part of Team Coast Guard -- military active duty and reserve, officer and enlisted, civilian and Auxiliary. A recent study on the competition for talent across 77 companies in North America revealed these are the most important factors in attracting and retaining talent:

1. Having a strong, positive, organizational identity, acts as a magnet to attract the kind of people an organization wants to hire and retain. Resources devoted to enhancing this identity will be well spent.
2. Talent goes where talent is. People want to be part of a highly talented team. This argues for hiring quality over quantity -- working hard to select only the most qualified candidates.
3. Job challenge and the ability to perform at a high level on a job with meaningful impact attract the best people to an organization. This is the "performance ethic" so attractive in top candidates.
4. The opportunity to continue personal and professional growth. Highly talented workers know they are in fact volunteers on the job they choose. They know it's to their advantage to broaden their experience and capabilities, so organizations that offer several avenues for growth have a distinct advantage.
5. Consider the value of "mass customizing the employee deal," or finding ways to tailor or build flexibility into the employee relationship. Allow flexibility in many areas, such as work hours, work location, team membership, job assignment, rewards.
6. Never underestimate the importance and value of performance feedback. Regular, frequent, honest feedback is critical to highly talented people who work constantly to grow and improve. Research shows to 18-to-early 30's "Generation Xers," frequent feedback is even more important than it is to our "traditional" and "baby boomer" workers. For Generation Xers raised on 30-second sound bites, daily seems to be the right frequency to receive feedback. Resources used to teach leaders how to better coach and counsel their subordinates also are well spent.

Compensation/retirement issues are being worked on, some the subject of previous Flag Voices and more to come. Many of the other issues have more to do with the workplace environment -- leaders and supervisors determining what and how things are to be done, how people are treated, rewarded, enabled to balance work-life, provided opportunities for growth, professional achievement and personal satisfaction. How can each of us make own piece of the Coast Guard better and help us retain our good people?

Regards, FL Ames

Flag Voice Contents

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